

THE LEGACY OF THE LOCH LOMONDSIDE WOLF

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**'Keep indoors by night and be wary by day,
There's a wolf on the move 'round Buchanan they say'.**

The above are the opening lines to a short poem entitled *The Wolf* composed around the turn of the century by Drymen poet-artist Sam Henry (f.1885-1909). In the poem, Henry describes the paralysing effect on a small Loch Lomondside community brought about by a rumour that a wolf *Canis lupus* L. had been seen prowling around the neighbourhood. Children were kept at home and no one would dare venture abroad during the hours of darkness. That is, until it was eventually discovered that the supposed wolf was nothing more terrifying than a stray rough-coated collie. Sam Henry's observations on the incident were written tongue-in-cheek, but they serve to illustrate the ingrained fear of the wolf which surfaced in the people, though no wolves had roamed wild anywhere in Scotland for over 150 years. Looking back at the Buchanan episode, there can be little doubt that even in the closing years of the 19th century, the ancestral deep distrust of the wolf was still being sustained by the oral tradition. Although today the wolf's undeserved reputation for being both cunning and evil is more likely to be kept going by well-meaning parents capturing the imagination of their children with fanciful stories such as Little Red Riding Hood, the animal's former presence in the Loch Lomond area can be recalled far more interestingly through the district's unusually rich legacy of wolf place names and folklore alongside recorded accounts.

The rural place names which appear on modern maps represent only a small proportion of the many individual names for familiar landmarks which were once in everyday use. Because so many of these early descriptive names have been forgotten and are now lost, it is worthy of notice that the Loch Lomond area can still lay claim to no less than five place names which bear witness to the former presence and probable abundance of wolves. Four of these five wolf place names are spelling variants of the creature's most common gaelic name *madadh*: Lochan a' Mhadaidh (NN 268217), Craig a' Mhadaidh (NN 332139), Craigmaddie (NS 5776), Knockvadie (NS 473801) and Wolf Burn (NS 603836). Hardy (1863) and Harting (1880) both considered neighbouring Stronachon or Stronahaun (NS 463993) -- Ridge of the (Wild) Dog -- to be a further locality named after the wolf.

Another Loch Lomondside place name which has long been associated with the wolf is Balfron (probably Bail'-abhroin), which means village of sorrow or mourning (Johnston, 1904). Passed down from generation to generation the traditional story would have us believe that, on one fateful day in the absence of their parents, all the children of the township were killed by marauding wolves. Thomson (1991) on the other hand, has recently suggested that the tale proba-

bly originates from the wolf having been used as a convenient scapegoat to explain away any sudden disappearance of an unwanted child born out of wedlock. This less palatable interpretation of a favourite story seems to have been at least partly responsible for Balfron High School ceasing to use a wolf's head in the design of its school badge in 1993.

Continuing the theme of folk tales, where the dividing line between fact and fiction has become blurred, several writers have referred to the deliberate firing of an extensive tract of ancient pine forest to the north of Loch Sloy to clear out an infestation of wolves. This is a story which first came from the imaginative pen of John Hay Allan (1822), alias John Sobieski Stolburg Stuart, and as the alleged eldest grandson of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, claimant to the Scottish throne. That around 1640 a great fire swept north through Strath Dubh-uisage to Glen Falloch and beyond is not in question, as the conflagration appears reliably recorded in the history of the Clan MacFarlane (Lauder, 1853; MacFarlane, 1922). However, the circumstance as recounted in the two latter publications is of a cattle thieves' hide-away near Loch Sloy being torched by the avenging MacFarlanes, but with a sudden strengthening of the wind the fire spread rapidly, burning uncontrollably through the pine forest for several days. Whether the destruction of Loch Lomondside's most northern forest was by accident or design, its effect on the resident or migratory wolf population would have been the same.

Well entrenched in highland folklore is the one-time custom of burying the dead on islands, to guard against ravenous wolves despoiling the graves. In describing his visit to Loch Lomondside in 1776, the Reverend William Gilpin (1789) points to Inchcailloch in the southern half of the loch as one such offshore burial ground. What is unusual for Scotland however, is that there appears to have even been a local belief in lycanthropy -- the ability of a man to take on the physical form of a wolf. The Reverend Robert Kirk (1644-1692) of Aberfoyle draws attention to the alleged existence of werewolves in his famous discourse on the supernatural, *The Secret Commonwealth* (Sanderson, 1976).

All of the historical evidence relating to the wolf in the general area stems from documentary sources which tell of the provisions made for ridding the countryside of a wild creature which was considered a serious threat to domestic stock. Beginning in the Middle Ages, official participation in reducing wolf numbers was initially centered on Stirling and Dumbarton Castles. An example of this is to be found in the Exchequer Rolls of Scotland for the years 1288-1290, which itemise the appointment of one 'hunter of wolves' at Stirling

(Stuart & Burnett, 1878). Until 1975, when Stirling lost its royal burgh status as the result of local government reform, the town's coat of arms included a wolf crouched on a rock known as the 'Wolf Craig'. Dumbarton Castle's involvement in keeping the wolf from the fold is recorded through a system of local taxation which provided the garrison with meal, at least part of which was used to feed the hunting dogs kept at the castle. First mentioned in a charter of 1348, the fourteen townships of Kilpatrick (on lands granted to Paisley Abbey by the Earl of Lennox in 1227) were obliged to make an annual payment of five chalders of 'watchmeal' to the Keeper of the castle. In 1455 the right to levy this tax was annexed by the crown, payment of the watchmeal continuing to be made to the castle authorities. Over the years, this obligation to provide a contribution of meal to Dumbarton Castle gradually changed to an annual sum of money (Fraser, 1874; Bruce, 1893; MacPhail, 1979). As will be shown later, what is remarkable about this particular piece of revenue raising connected with the wolf is that it lingered on well into the late 20th century.

The main onslaught against the herdsman's age-old enemy came with a series of enactments made by the Scottish parliament between 1427-1577, which placed the responsibility for organising repressive measures against wolves onto the barons, sheriffs and bailies. These statutory regulations - which, incidentally, were not repealed until this century (Anon, 1906) - stipulated the seeking out of the wolf's breeding dens to kill the whelps or cubs, four (later reduced to three) full scale hunts per year and the amount of bounty money for every wolf's head presented for payment (Hardy, 1863; Harting, 1880; Fittis, 1891). In practice, compliance with the legislation tended to be passed down the line, in one particular case providing good evidence for believing that the wolf was still present in the northern-most parts of Loch Lomondside in the first quarter of the 17th century. The Barony Court Book of Glen Orchy (Innes, 1855) contains an entry detailing the following estate instruction dated 1621 from Sir Duncan Campbell to all his tenants, which included his second son Robert Campbell of Glen Falloch 'Item it is statute and ordanit that euirie tennent within the saidis boundis respectiue mak four croscattis of irone for slaying of the wolff yeirly in tyme cuming, under the paine of four pundis money toties quoties incais of failyie' (croscatt: believed to be a stabbing spear with a short cross-piece set back from the point as a stop to prevent the weapon passing right through the wolf's body, which would increase the risk of injury to the hunter through close contact with the wounded animal - see Blackmore (1971) for examples. The specification of iron in the making of the weapon may be significant, for there is an old highland superstition that the metal protected its user against harm). Unfortunately, there is no recorded date when the wolf was finally expelled from Loch Lomondside, but it can be reasonably assumed that banishment almost certainly followed the burning of its last secure refuge within the native pine forests of Strath Dubh-uisage and Glen Falloch in the mid 17th century.

This was not quite the end of the wolf's story in the area however, for in 1706 we find the Duke of Montrose (who in 1702 had purchased the feu superiority of the lands of Lennox, including all mails and duties payable to Dumbarton Castle) pursuing the 'heritors, vassals and portioners of the fourteen townes within the royalty of Kilpatrick' in the Dumb-

arton sheriff court for payment of the watchmeal in kind. Having become used to paying the tax in ready money, the defendants argued that a meal levy was an anachronism, particularly as there were no longer any wolves left in the Kilpatrick Hills to necessitate the keeping of dogs to hunt them down. Their plea fell on deaf ears, and again in an appeal to the Court of Session in 1712 (Fraser, 1874; Bruce, 1893; MacPhail, 1979). The watchmeal saga then leaps forward a hundred or so years, with the Kilpatrick superiority having been bought-up by a wealthy mill and factory owner, William Dunn of Duntocher, who used the individual freeholds to set up some of his political supporters as 'parchment barons' to qualify them for the vote (the use of 'paper freeholds' as a qualification for the vote was abolished by the Reform Act of 1832). William Dunn died in 1849, although the estate was not finally wound up until 1873, by which time all but one of the Kilpatrick owners and occupiers had taken up the option of buying-out their obligation to pay the watchmeal duty. The sole unredeemed share of the right to exact payment of the watchmeal tax (which had again been commuted to money) was acquired by the lawyer acting for the Dunn estate trustees, David Murray LL.D of Cardross. Dr Murray, who was also a well known historian and bibliophile, purchased the remaining feu superiority as an antiquarian curiosity. Fifty-five years later on David Murray's own death in October 1928, this superiority, together with his library of local books and papers, was bequeathed to Dumbarton Public Library as 'The Watchmeal Collection' (MacPhail, 1979; Murray, 1933). Right up to 1975, when Dumbarton (like Stirling) lost its burgh status through regionalisation, the annual income from this surviving portion of a local tax once levied to control wolves, was used by the library to add the occasional book to the Watchmeal Collection.

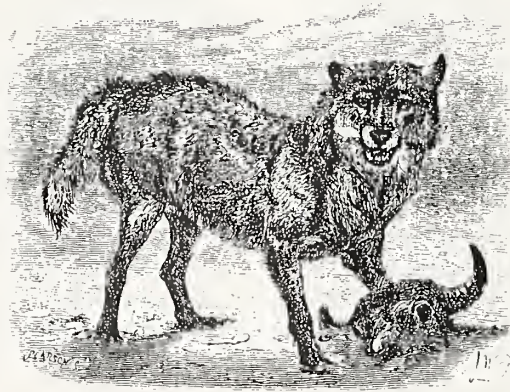
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The Wolf, from Harting's *British Animals extinct within Historic Times* (1880).